



Al-Risala 1986

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Editorial

Readers of the English version of AI-Risala will be pleased to hear that the journal is establishing itself in the world at large, and is gaining in popularity far and wide. The latest news we have in this regard is that an African edition of AI-Risala has been launched.

In one African country, there is a group of people dedicated to the AI-Risala cause. They had previously been ordering copies from the Delhi Office and distributing them in their own country. But this method is only suitable for a limited number of copies. So they decided to bring out an edition of AI-Risala in their own country. They worked together towards this end, and ultimately their efforts bore fruit. In March 1986, the first issue of the African edition of AI-Risala appeared. The contents and title-page of this edition are exactly the same as in the Delhi edition. This is done by taking Delhi edition, making a photocopy of it, then reprinting it as it is.

Their efforts have our full support. Without doubt, this is an extremely suitable and effective method of spreading the message of AI-Risala on an international level. We would be happy to see supporters of AI-Risala, and anyone who wishes to serve the cause it represents, following in their footsteps in every country of the world.

For various reasons, it has become very difficult nowadays for a magazine printed in one place to have a large-scale distribution throughout the world. But modern technology has made it quite possible for a fully-composed magazine to be reprinted in another country and distributed there in exactly the same way as it is in its country of origin. God has given us the means to do this. We should take full advantage of the opportunities He has provided us to serve His cause.

There is no doubt that the English AI-Risala is quite unique of its kind. It is the only publication in the Muslim world which confines itself to spreading the Word of God. It has nothing to do with politics, or with internal Muslim controversies. Its sole purpose is to present the positive, universal message of Islam-in a simple manner-before the general reader. There is no other journal of this nature in the entire Muslim world. Now that such a journal has come into existence, people should make full use of it, reprinting it and spreading it in their own countries. This is the most basic and effective method through which they can serve the AI-Risala cause.

(Publisher)

A Month of Training

The Prophet Mohammad called the month of Ramadhan a month of patience. And the Quran states that fasting during this month has been prescribed so that man may become God-fearing. These being two qualities which are required of us every month of the year, why is it that they have been so particularly mentioned in connection with the month of Ramadhan?

The reason for this is that Ramadhan is the special period of the year during which these qualities are to be cultivated. Of course, patience and piety are required of every Muslim every day of the year and every year of his entire life. They are part of a code to which he must at all times adhere. But in this one particular month, special stress has been laid upon them so that they become an integral part of the human character. This is done by laying down a certain discipline, so that much as people may want to do something, they will then refrain from doing it, if it is an action displeasing to God. If they wish to eat or drink something, no matter how strong their desires, they will not do so if divine law prohibits it. They will follow the will of God irrespective of the circumstances and regardless of any difficulties they encounter in the process. Even if it means leaving behind, or abstaining from that which they hold most dear, they will not abandon the way of God.

Ramadhan is a kind of “Crash Course” aimed at filling people with a truly religious spirit and making them conscious of their responsibilities to God. For one month in the year, people spend all of their time in divine worship, all of their days and nights being spent in prayer and fasting. In this way, people are trained to perform every action in the divinely appointed way. Their waking and sleeping, their eating and their abstinence, the action and inaction—all must be in accordance with the commands of God. This is how a true servant of God should behave, not just on special occasions, but on every day of the year. For one month, certain habits are enforced as part of definite discipline, so that for the rest of the year, he will have no difficulty in exercising the same control over all of his actions.

One thoroughly imbued with the qualities of patience and piety during the month of Ramadhan, even the most ordinary and weak-willed of individual is able to maintain the same high standard of conduct throughout the rest of year.

Prayer

Here are some sayings of the Prophet Mohammad concerning prayer:

“Prayer – that is what worship is.” (*Ahmad*)

“Prayer is the essence of worship.” (*Tirmidhi*)

“God becomes displeased with one who does not beseech Him.” (*Tirmidhi*)

“Nothing, save prayer, can avert fate.” (*Tirmidhi*)

“As long as one does not pray for an abomination, or for the severing of some bond of kinship, God will grant one whatever one prays to Him for, or else withhold evil from the supplicant in like degree.” (*Tirmidhi*)

“There is nothing dearer to God than prayer.” (*Ibn Majah*)

“Call on God, asking Him of His bounty, for the Lord loves to be called upon.” (*Tirmidhi*)

“Prayer helps with regard to what has happened, and what has not happened. Have recourse to prayer then, you servants of God.” (*Ahmad*)

“Each one of you should beseech God for his every need. Why, even when the strap of his sandal breaks, he should pray to God.” (*Tirmidhi*)

Prayer is an acknowledgement of the supplicant’s absolute helplessness on the one hand, as opposed to God’s absolute power on the other. The act of prayer puts man in his true place, and also gives God His rightful station. Prayer, then, is to accept things as they are; it is the ultimate degree of realism, and the apprehension of reality, in turn, is the most excellent of all actions. For, in this world, where man has been given a choice between belief and disbelief, between acknowledgement and denial, there is nothing greater than acceptance of the true nature of things.

Opening the Closed Doors of the Universe

There are several verses in the Quran which explain how everything in the universe is constantly engaged in praise and remembrance of God; everything provides a perfect example of submission to the Almighty; everything humbles itself before the Lord Most High. One such verse is given below:

“Do you not see that to God bow all things in the heavens and on earth: the sun and the moon and the stars, the mountains and the trees, the beasts and many men? Yet many have deserved His scourge. He who is humbled by God has none to honour Him. God does what He pleases” (22: 18).

The natural phenomena mentioned in this verse – the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, trees and animals – were, as the highly authoritative Quranic commentator, Ibn Kathir has observed, singled out because they were the very things that polytheists used to worship besides God. Far from being objects of worship, the Quran says, these things are objects of God’s creation; they are subservient upto Him and dependent upon Him. Their function should be studied carefully, for they provide mankind with a perfect model for his own worship of his Lord. Whereas nature follows the divine pattern universally and perfectly, only part of mankind follows suit. Man should look closely at the way nature operates, so that he too can mould his life in accordance with the pattern that his Creator has prescribed.

It was with the revelation of verses such as this that the Quran opened the way for scientific research into natural phenomena. While the objects of God’s creation were considered objects of worship, it was impossible for man to conduct objective research into their nature; for “God” cannot be studied, nor can His secrets be unveiled. The Quran unharnessed the human intellect by stressing that the sun, moon and stars – the very things that polytheists had considered objects of worship, were in fact objects of investigation. Man was now free, and indeed encouraged, to conduct research into their function and properties.

By refuting polytheism and setting up monotheism in its place, the Quran put paid to the idea that the phenomena of creation were sacrosanct; it now became possible to look at them as topics for scientific research. It was for this reason that in the early centuries of the Islamic era, the Muslims were in the forefront of every field of scientific learning. Their contributions to scientific progress were a sign of their having become imbued with the spirit of the Book of God. Their present backwardness in every field of science, and failure to adapt the lessons of nature to their own lives, are correspondingly indicative of their abandonment of Quranic teachings.

Digging for Talent

“Will they not ponder on the Quran? Are there locks upon their hearts?” The Prophet Mohammad recited this verse, from the Surah of the Quran bearing his own name. There was a boy sitting with the Prophet at the time. “Quite so; Prophet of God!” he exclaimed. “There are indeed locks upon their hearts. None can open them, save He who locked them in the first place,” When Umer ibn Khattab became Caliph, he summoned this boy, and delegated some task to him. “He showed intelligence in what he said,” was how Umer explained his selection of this particular boy for the job in hand.

No individual can exercise effective authority within a society if he does not have the support of dependable workers. It is always the workers of a community, group, movement or organization, that make or break it. The necessary potential is always there within the individuals of a society just waiting to be tapped; there are always people who, if their talents are channelled in the right direction, can inject dynamism into a movement. Those who are responsible for choosing workers, however, must have the ability to delegate tasks to those who are fit for them, They must be able to dig deep into the characters of the manpower at their disposal, and select people on the basis of their essential qualities, not for any ulterior motive.

If people in authority are out to fill their own pockets; if they prefer to be surrounded by sycophants, people of inferior ability to themselves, who pose no threat to their own authority: then their organization will deteriorate into a rubbish dump of ineffectual individuals. But if they show the eye for talent which Umer ibn Khattab displayed, then the movement they represent will flourish like a garden, full of healthy trees and giving fruit at every season.

The War and Peace of the Spirit

In the modern age we find a world of material advancement accompanied by human backwardness. It is true that man has taken great strides forward in recent times, but his progress has been in technological, scientific and industrial fields. Nothing has been done to improve the state of man as such.

The extraordinary paradox of the present world is that we have here the facilities for contentment, but we do not have contentment itself. There is outward laughter and frivolity, but inward peace is lacking. There are all sorts of amenities aimed at making people happy, but true happiness – that is something which seems to elude everyone.

What man desires more than anything is inner peace, and that is what modern man is bereft of. The material progress that has been made in the modern age has only served to deprive man of true contentment. Advances in civilization may have given man outward comfort, but they have done nothing to improve his inner well-being.

The reason for this is quite simple: the spirit cannot gain contentment from material things. It is inconceivable that an entity of such a sublime order as the human soul should be able to find fulfillment in ordinary, lowly, material things. One can only agree with Julian of Norwich's words: "Our soul may never rest in things that are beneath itself."

If one looks at the world of creation, one finds nothing superior to man. He is, inherently, the most noble of God's creatures. There is only one being that surpasses man in excellence, and that is his Creator. There can only be one way, then, for man to achieve inner peace and contentment: he must discover his Creator, come to know Him, and live in remembrance of Him. Nothing less than the Lord most High can provide man with the peace of mind that he seeks more than anything.

The Quran has put this truth in the following succinct words:

"Say: 'God leaves in error whom He will, and guides those who repent and have faith and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God. Surely in the remembrance of God all hearts are comforted'" (13:27-28).

Social Behaviour

A certain Mr. Ajwani was appointed as a Sales representative in a large pharmaceuticals firm in Calcutta in 1965. His predecessor had been engaged at a monthly salary of Rs. 1,200/- plus rail expenses. Mr. Ajwani made it clear that he would not accept less than Rs. 3,000/- per month and that he would only agree to travel by air when he had to visit other towns to take orders. The director who was interviewing him pointed out that, in terms of his total expenses, that was much too much. But Mr. Ajwani replied, "I will give you 'much too much' work in return. Just give me a chance and you will see". There was something very engaging about the way he put his arguments, and finally he was appointed as the firm's representative for the area of Gujrat.

In those days a certain famous lady doctor had a flourishing practice in one of the towns of Gujrat, but although her clinic required great quantities of medicines, she refused point blank to meet pharmaceuticals agents if they were males. It had so happened that an agent had once used his knowledge of palmistry as a pretext to hold her hand and then kiss it. After this very disturbing affair, she had come to feel apprehensive about the behaviour of other agents, and refused to allow any of them even to enter her clinic.

When Mr. Ajwani was on the point of setting off on a business trip which was to take him to this very city, he told his director that he was confident that he would get orders from this lady doctor. The director told him not to be so naive, for everyone knew that this was a sheer impossibility. Her attitude was so well-known that none of the agents had the remotest hope of ever meeting her, far less of receiving orders from her.

Undaunted, Mr. Ajwani set off. In the plane, he found himself seated next to an elderly lady who was obviously of a good family. They had hardly taken off when the old lady had a sudden fit of coughing. Some sputum came into her mouth and she became quite flustered. Mr. Ajwani, seeing how awkward she felt, quickly placed his handkerchief in front of her mouth so that she could spit into it. Then he went to the bathroom and disposed of it. His thoughtfulness impressed her greatly and they chatted amicably for the rest of the flight. When the plane landed, they disembarked together, he helping her with her hand luggage. On coming out of the 'arrivals' lounge, she was distressed to discover that no car had come to receive her. Mr. Ajwani once again offered to be of help, saying that he could easily drop her at her home by taxi before going on to his hotel. She gratefully agreed to this and; on reaching home, made a note of his name and address before saying goodbye to him.

Shortly afterwards, her daughter came back home and was surprised to find her mother there. She felt very sorry that the message about her arrival had never reached her, and that her mother had no car to receive her and bring her home. "You must have had difficulty in coming home alone," she said to her

mother. "Not at all," the old lady replied, and, her eyes shining with gratitude, she told her the whole story of the kind gentleman she had met on the plane. The daughter was very favourably impressed and immediately telephoned Mr. Ajwani at his hotel to thank him and invite him to dinner. Mr. Ajwani promptly accepted her invitation, and, when they were introduced to each other, he discovered, to his great surprise, that she was none other than the famous lady doctor who hated male agents. When she learnt that Mr. Ajwani represented a pharmaceuticals company, she lost no time in placing a sizeable order with him, and added that since she always needed large quantities of medicines in her clinic, he could take it that she would be a regular customer and that he could keep sending her supplies every month.

After dinner, he immediately trunk-called his boss from his hotel to give him the good news. His boss could hardly believe his ears and thought at first that he must be joking. But two days later, he thought differently when he received the cheque and the order signed by her.

On a subsequent occasion when I had occasion to meet Mr. Ajwani, I asked him, just by the way, to give me some good business tips. He replied, "Polite conversation and gentle manly behaviour." I added, "Yes, even when there appears to be no obvious advantage!"

Polite behaviour falls into two categories. One follows the conventional etiquette reserved for relatives, acquaintances and people with whom one's interests are associated. It is socially beneficial in that it makes relationships easier, smoother and more generally civilized. Even if such behaviour is sometimes artificial, it has a certain positive, social value. The other kind of good behaviour is completely natural, straight from the heart and based on genuine consideration for others. When it becomes a matter of habit with people from all walks of life, it is of inestimable value in all human relations. It is not, of course, something which one "switches on" in the hopes of immediate reward, but is something rather which eventually benefits one in innumerable, often intangible, ways, simply because it makes for social harmony at its best.

Earning God's Protection

In 571AD, Abraha, the Abyssinian ruler of the Yemen, set out to destroy the Kabah in Mecca. A Christian by faith, he had built a structure named Al-Qulees in the town of Sana'a, which he had hoped would replace the Kabah as a centre of pilgrimage for the whole of Arabia. When he saw that the Arabs showed no sign of forsaking their ancient place of pilgrimage, however, he determined to destroy it.

When his force, fully armed and equipped with twelve elephants, reached Maghmas in the vicinity of Mecca, they plundered some property of the people of Mecca, including 200 camels belonging to Abdul Muttalib, the grandfather of the Prophet Mohammad. When Abraha asked to meet the most noble and esteemed citizen of Mecca, it was Abdul Muttalib who was brought before him. Abraha assured Abdul Muttalib that he had no aggressive designs against the people of Mecca. He was, however, intent on destroying the Kabah and would fight them if they sought to defend it. Abdul Muttalib replied that they had no intention of fighting Abraha's army, and did not possess the strength to do so. When Abraha asked if he had any request to make, Abdul Muttalib asked him to return the 200 camels which had been taken away from him. Abraha was astonished that Abdul Muttalib should think only of his camels, when the Holy Kabah – the ancient centre of Arab religion – was in deadly peril. "I am master of my camels," Abdul Muttalib explained. "As for the Kabah, it has a Master of its own: He will protect it." (*Tahzeeb Seerat Ibn Hisham*, p.28)

Abdul Muttalib then returned to his people, and advised them to take refuge from Abraha's army among the peaks and passes in the heights of the mountains. There they waited to see what would happen when Abraha entered Mecca. They witnessed an extraordinary sight. The forces of nature came together to obstruct Abraha's designs. First of all his elephants either refused to stand up, or else insisted on proceeding in a direction opposite to the Kabah. Then a swarm of birds appeared in the sky, flying in from the sea. Each one of them was carrying pebbles in its beak, and in the claws of each foot. They dropped the pebbles on the army, slaying everyone they hit, including Abraha himself.

One question that arises from this episode is why was it that Abdul Muttalib made no effort to defend the Kabah when Abraha had clearly expressed his hostile intentions against that most holy of Arab sanctuaries, while he told his people, who had received assurances from Abraha that he had no intention of harming them, to seek refuge in the mountains. This can be understood when one remembers that the people of Mecca had, by worshipping idols in the House of God, destroyed the sanctity of that holy place. They had thus forfeited all right to God's protection. The Kabah itself, however, was still dear to God, and He protected it for the time when a Prophet would come to destroy the idols that had been lodged there, and re-establish the worship of One God within its walls.

The attack of Abraha on the Kabah occurred in the year of the Prophet Mohammad's birth. It was a clear sign from God of the coming of a Prophet whose followers would be assured of divine succour and protection in exactly the same way as the Holy Kabah had been protected, in the not-so-distant past, from the vicious attack of a powerful enemy. All they would have to do, as the Quran makes clear, was "worship the Lord of this House who fed them in the days of famine and shielded them from all perils" (106:4).

The lesson to be learnt from the "episode of the elephants", as it is called, is that when Muslims are faced with political peril and military threat, they should concentrate on consolidating their position as God's servants. Disclaiming all pretences of personal power, they should trust in God and leave it to Him to ward off all enemies, they should become as firm in their worship of God as the Kabah itself, their centre of worship, which has stood firm over the centuries as a monument to true religion.

Above all, to ensure that God will defend their cause, the Muslims must make it their prime purpose in life to communicate the message of Islam to other nations of the world. The Quran says that just as the Kabah is a medium between man and God, a symbol of worship which enables man to establish his true relationship with the Lord, so the Muslims are a medium between God and man, charged with the responsibility of communicating the message of Islam to other nations of the world. Just as the Prophet of Islam conveyed the word of God to his followers, so his followers are charged to pass it on to other nations. If they faithfully discharge this responsibility, then they are assured of God's protection, as He protected His Kabah from the army of Abraha, and protected His Prophet from enemies:

"And (just as We have made the Kabah an intermediary), so we have made you (the Muslims) an intermediary nation, so that you may testify to mankind and that your own Apostle may testify to you." (Quran, 2:143)

The Gathering Storm

On the 11th of August, 1979, Maurvi in Gujrat was struck by a flash flood which left total devastation in its wake. Swollen by excessively heavy rains, the water level rose so high that a huge dam on the edge of the settlement burst its retaining wall. "Walls of water 20 feet high bore down on the settlement with such rapidity that no one could escape their onslaught. In just a few hours time, this flood water, which had destroyed all animate and inanimate objects in its path, receded as suddenly as it had come." It was estimated that, out of a total population of about 40,000, as many as 25,000 had died in this cataclysm. The extent of the destruction can be gauged from the fact that; over and above public contributions, the central government thought it proper to make an immediate allocation of five crores of rupees to the Gujrat government as aid.

Arun Kumar, a *Hindustan Times* reporter, published an eye-witness account of the survivors' woeful plight. Still in the grip of shock and suffering, "some have lost their powers of speech and look absolutely dazed and blank" (19 August, 1979). Another report (20 August, 1979) tells of how overjoyed a ruined landlord was when he was handed over Rs. 18,000/- in cash and gold ornaments weighing 225 grams which had been recovered from his house and restored to him by government officials.

If such events occur frequently on earth, it is to remind man of the irrevocability of the Day of Judgement. The great flood which will herald the end of the world will come upon us, suddenly, and without warning. The scale of destruction will be such that people's tongues will fail them and they will be absolutely dazed, realizing too late that they are confronted by eternal doom. There will, however, be those who will receive the glad tidings that the deluge, which is apparently bringing death and destruction to everyone and everything, will miraculously leave them unscathed, and that God will not only restore to them what is theirs, but will shower them with even greater blessings. The flash flood of that day will condemn some to hell-fire, while it will carry others on the crest of a wave, to the gates of eternal bliss. Prior to the flood, criminals and reprobates will easily find eloquent excuses for their cruel, wicked ways. But when the flood waters of destruction are about to come crashing down on them, all their strength will ebb away, and they will find no words to justify the perpetration of unjust acts in the world they are about to leave behind them.

Womanhood in Islam

Fear of God and honouring of one's fellow men – this is the twin foundation of Islam, laid down in the Quran with these words:

“Mankind, fear your Lord who created you from one soul and created man's mate from the same soul, from these two scattering on earth many men and women. Fear God, in whose name you entreat one another, and be careful not to sever your ties of kinship. Allah is watching over what you do.” (Quran, 4:1)

The words, “and created man's mate from the same soul” have been explained as meaning that first Adam was created from earth; then a rib was taken from his body, out of which Eve – his mate – was formed. But there is nothing in the Quran to support this theory. It is a biblical explanation, not a Quranic one. Here is what the Book of Genesis has to say about the creation of Eve:

And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made the woman, and brought her up to the man.

And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (Genesis, 2:23-24)

From this biblical tradition comes the theory that Eve was created from Adam's rib. This theory has been adopted by some commentators of the Quran, who have used it to explain Eve's creation “from the same soul as Adam”. But theory does not stand up in the face of established fact, and it has been established that, over the centuries, the Bible has been subjected to alterations and additions. Its present form is no longer as the Prophets originally taught it. Along with Prophetic inspiration, it has received a fair injection of human interpolation. For this reason, one cannot rely on explanations given in the Bible, nor is it proper to explain verses of the Quran in the light of biblical statements.

Neither in the verse of the Quran quoted above, nor in any other verse of the Quran, is there any mention of Eve having been created from Adam's rib. The Quran says only that Eve was created from “it”. What this “it” refers to is the point in question. Most of those commentators who have penetrated deep into the meaning of the Quran have taken “it” to refer to “species”: Eve was created – not from Adam himself – but from the same species as Adam. This is the explanation given – among others – by Abu Muslim Asfahani, and it is this explanation that fits in with other verses of the Quran.

In several verses of the Quran the word for “soul” (“nafs”) has been used to mean “species”. Such verses provide a clear elucidation of the verse quoted above. A selection of them is given here:

“God has created for you spouses, of your own kind” (16:72).

“And of His signs is that He has created for you – of your own kind – spouses, that you might take comfort in them” (30:21).

“Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you spouses of your own kind, and the cattle He has also created in pairs” (42:11).

From a perusal of these verses one can see that the same word has been used for the spouses of ordinary human beings as was used for Adam’s spouse in the verse quoted above. Just as Eve was created from Adam’s “nafs”, so other women have also been created from the same “nafs” – or kind – as their male counterparts.

Clearly there is no question, in these other verses, of inferring that every female spouse has been created from the body of the male. There is no alternative but to take the word “nafs”, occurring in these verses, as meaning “kind”. God has created for you spouses of your very own kind, the Quran is telling us, in order that they may provide you with true companionship in your journey through life.

To summarize, women and men are from the same species. Biologically speaking, women have not been extracted from the bodies of their male counterparts. God fashioned them according to His Will, just as He fashioned men in accordance with His Almighty Will and Power.

Sayings of the Prophet

Now we come to certain sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammad in which the Arabic word for “rib” (“dhil’a”) has been mentioned. The first thing that has to be remembered here is that these traditions are about ordinary women, and do not refer to the creation of Adam and Eve. It is the manner of every woman’s creation that is being dealt with, not specifically that of Eve. One of the sayings concerned is as follows:

“Treat women well, for they have been created from a rib.”

Now this cannot be taken to mean that women have actually been created from a rib, for this has no connection with the point being conveyed in the rest of the sentence, which is that women should be treated well. A correct interpretation of the word “rib” has to be one that fits in with the underlying purpose behind the Prophet’s statement.

The statement, “Women have been created from a rib”, should be taken metaphorically, not literally. What the Prophet wished to convey was this: “Women are akin to a rib and should be treated with due consideration.” There is another tradition which explains what this means. “A woman is like a rib,” said the Prophet: “If you try to straighten it, it will break.”

This saying of the Prophet Mohammad, related in the Sahihah of both Bukhari and Muslim – the most authentic collections of traditions – makes it clear that women are like ribs; they are not actually created from ribs. The allusion is figurative not literal. Light is also cast on the meaning of the metaphor. Ribs

break when one tries to straighten them. So it is with women. Rather than try to straighten them, it is better to let them be.

“Women have been created from ribs”, and “Women are like ribs” are just two different ways of saying the same thing. There is a difference in mode of expression between the two statements, but there is no difference in meaning. It is common in every language for metaphors to be expressed directly, without the use of the words “like” or “as”. For instance, if one wishes to pay tribute to a person’s bravery, one can say that he is like a lion. But there is not as much force in saying that a person is like a lion as there is in saying that he is a lion. Examples of such usage of language abound in every language, including English.

A notable one is to be found in the poem, *Morte d’ Arthur*, by the celebrated poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson:

“..... More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of, wherefore, let thy voice,
Rise like a fountain for me night and day
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

In this last line the poet does not mean that the world is physically tethered to the feet of God by chains, but merely wishes to indicate the unbreakable bonds that exist between God and this world. In referring to the chains as “golden”, he suggests the very great beauty and value of these bonds. By referring to the “feet” of God, rather than any other part of Him, he suggests the humble position of man in God’s divine scheme. It is, indeed a very rich metaphor.

To return to the metaphor of the rib, in saying that if one tries to straighten a woman one will break her, the Prophet was referring to her delicate nature. Physically, women are weaker than men; psychologically, they are more highly strung, more prone to emotional upset. This is a fact of life which every one realizes, irrespective of whether he is educated or not. A father, for instance, will not be as hard on a daughter as he might be on his son, for he knows that boys are made of sterner stuff than girls. The latter tend to break under severe pressure. For this reason females are more prone to suicide than males. Sometimes a trivial matter can drive a woman to suicide, or cause her to have a nervous breakdown.

In likening women to a rib, the Prophet was expressing this fact of life in metaphorical terms. Ribs have a slight curve in them. There is good reason for them being made that way. They should be left in their

natural state. No attempt should be made to straighten them. The Prophet used a parable to explain the delicacy of women's nature, pointing out that they should be treated in accordance with their nature. Their delicate emotional constitution should always be borne in mind. God has created them that way, and He has done so for good reason. They should be treated kindly. If they have to be told something, it should be done tactfully, in a gentle tone. Abruptness and severity will break them, as a rib is broken by any attempt to straighten it.

Once, when the Prophet was on a journey, he saw some women riding on a camel. The man leading the camel made to drive the animal on faster, forgetting that this would cause undue discomfort to his passengers. So the Prophet said to the camel-driver: "You have glass cases there. Be gentle with them."

Modern Research

In recent times, it has been accepted as fact, on a purely academic level, that fundamental, inborn differences do exist between men and women. A detailed article on the Status of Women in the 1984 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* includes a section on Scientific Studies of Male-Female differences. Here the author points out physical differences in the respective constitutions of male and female forms of the human species. "With respect to personality traits," he writes, "men are characterized by greater aggressiveness, dominance and achievement motivation, women by greater dependency, a stronger social orientation, and the tendency to be more easily discouraged by failure than men."

(*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 19, p.907)

And there are a number of latter-day scientific experiments to back this up. One such experiment was conducted in the U.S.A. An infant boy and girl were hand-picked for the experiment. Neither was old enough to talk and health-wise there was nothing to choose between the two. The two infants were placed in separate crates, and the exits closed. The girl cried loudly. The boy, on the other hand, started feeling round the walls of his crate, searching for a means of escape.

Child specialists say that male-female differences are entirely genetic in nature. The passivity found in women is due to the particular nature of the female hormone. Differences between male and female hormones exist from birth; they are not acquired later, as would be the case if they stemmed from differences in environment.

The tenets of Islam are based wholly on nature. This is because Islam is the religion of nature. The laws Islam requires us to follow are, in fact, our own instinctive human requirements expressed in legal terms. And the teachings of Islam with respect to women are no exception. They too are based on nature. Modern psychological, biological and anatomical research proves women to be more passive than men. This is the way their Maker has fashioned them. The nature of their womanhood, the special part they have to play in society, demand that they should be just as they have been made – that is, relatively delicate as compared to men.

It is this fact of nature on which Islamic teachings have been based. Because of women's delicate constitution, Islam teaches men to be gentle with them. That way they will not lose heart or become too despondent to perform their special duties in life. Women are not like iron and steel, immune to beating and rough treatment. No, they are like ribs, fragile and delicate. It is best to let them be, in their natural state. If one treats them as though they were tough metal, one will only break them.

Summary

God "created man's mate from the same soul" means simply that women are of the same species as men. God created them that way so that there should be harmony between the two sexes. If men and women had been derived from different species – if one had been made from fire, for instance, and the other from earth – then the two would have been unable to get on together. Family life would have lacked peace and harmony; men and women would have been unable to struggle hand in hand to build a better world.

As for the saying of the Prophet likening women to a rib, it is a parable illustrating the need to treat women gently on the basis of their particular, natural constitution. The Prophet of Islam delivered this advice time and time again, in various words, and it is something that he himself practiced throughout his life.

In the time of the Prophet, women used to attend the night prayer. Sometimes they used to take their small children along with them. The Prophet used to pay special attention to strict and full observance of prayer. Yet so great was his consideration for women that sometimes, when he heard babies crying, he would cut short the prayer. He once said: "Sometimes I stand up for prayer, my intention being to make it a long one. Then I hear a baby crying. So I cut short the prayer, not wanting to make things difficult for the child's mother." (*Bukhari*)

18 June 1986

Pride Precedes a fall

The Prophet had a she-camel named Adhba. No one would let their camel walk ahead of it. One day a desert-dweller, riding on a small she-camel, came along and rode in front of the Prophet. When the Prophet realized that this was not to the liking of his companions, he said: "God has taken upon Himself to bring low anything which raises itself up in the world." (*Bukhari*)

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Pride is To Scorn the Truth

Pride was mentioned in the Prophet's presence, and he had some harsh words to say about it. Then he recited this verse: "God does not love the arrogant and boastful." (Quran, 4:36) Someone admitted to the Prophet that he was fond of the whiteness' of his clothes when they had been washed, of his sandals when they were properly strapped up. "This is not pride," the Prophet told him. "Pride is to pour scorn on the truth, and to look down on people."

(Tafseer Ibn Kathir, Vol. III)

The Trial of Life

The Quran tells us how, when man was first put on earth, Iblis, (Satan) along with the angels, was commanded to bow before Adam. He refused to do so, claiming that he was better than Adam. Why should he bow before an inferior creature? The angels, on the other hand, obeyed God's command immediately. They had no hesitation in bowing before Adam, the first man.

Adam's encounter with Iblis and the angels took place at the very outset of man's time on earth. Thus God gave notice to all future generations of mankind that they too would have to face a similar encounter. The test which Iblis and the angels were put to was one which humans, in every day and age, would have to face. Not only Iblis and the Angels, but the whole human race, would be required to bow before an "Adam". Herein would lie their test in life. Would they be willing to bow before "Adam" when confronted with him? Would they be resigned to a downgrading of their own position? Would they be willing to take a back seat, setting others to the fore? Would they have regard for truth at all times, laying aside all thoughts of personal superiority? Would they accept anything in the path of God, even if it meant bowing before another human being, one who might seem inferior to themselves?

Time and time again in life, man is put to the test in this way. He is made to give precedence to another, in the process burying the notion: "I am better than he is." There are two ways of reacting to this test. Either we can be humble, as the angels were, and downgrade ourselves, or we can follow in the footsteps of Satan, who refused in his pride to bow before one whom God had raised over him. In whomsoever's tracks we tread, we shall follow to their respective destinations.

The struggle that is life entails nothing less than dying before one dies, for that is what "bowing before Adam" entails. It may seem an unbearable prospect, like lying down in the dust and letting others trample over one's body, but that is what life is all about: bearing the unbearable. It is those who are able to do this who will occupy an abode of eternal bliss. There, they will have nothing to bear, only everlasting freedom and infinite happiness to savour and enjoy.

From Roots to Fruits

A cyclist whose brake got jammed took his cycle to a mechanic and asked him to repair the offending part, thinking that the mechanic would set to work on it at the point where the brake had got jammed. To his dismay, the mechanic took a hammer and began to rain blows on it at quite another point. The cyclist looked on in astonishment. Then the mechanic said, "It's all right now," and true enough, when he tried it out, he found that it had been set in order.

The reform of our nation is something which needs to be looked at in the same manner. Muslims are not united; they have no constructive policy; they are divided into opposing groups; there is no consensus about either the major or the minor issues confronting them. The plight of the average Muslims shows no signs of being alleviated. It is felt that the solution lies in holding large-scale conferences and conventions, drawing up impressive agendas and passing high-sounding resolutions. Fiery speeches are then made on Islam, ostensibly to inspire and arouse the people. But all of this is beside the point. It is an attempt to solve problems at the point at which they appear to have arisen. And this approach is basically wrong, for it frequently happens in life that a problem arises at one point while its solution lies at another. One who travels upwards from the roots will one day, having made acquaintance with trunk, branches, twigs, leaves and flowers arrive finally at the fruit. His experience will justify his ownership of the entire tree and all its yield. But he who starts with the fruit will in the end own neither roots nor fruits.

The first thing which Muslims should do, if their problems are to be solved, is to change their whole way of thinking. They must be willing to go deeper into things in order to understand problems at the grassroots level. It is not just by assembling Muslims at a "Unity Conference" that one will set them on the road to achieving unity. The start will have to be made by working seriously and unobtrusively at the true points of relevance, no matter how near or far they appear to be from the initial point of impetus. Although problems have reared their heads at the community level, they shall have to be solved at the level of individuals. It is only then that there will be any possibility of solving problems at the national level.

The greatest obstacle in our path is by no means some external agency; it is rather the weakness of our own leaders in that they are willing to exert themselves only in those spheres which will bring them the maximum publicity. They are only interested in having the opportunity to display themselves. This weakness results in no leader being ready to engage himself in silent, unadvertised struggle. The leader whose aspirations centre on his own honour and glory will participate only in those activities which will bring him public acclaim. This, ironically, is the very kind of leader who exhorts others to work quietly behind the scenes and to shun the limelight. Such hollow behaviour will never lead to any qualitative or quantitative improvement in the Muslim position. With leaders who are bent on building their own public image rather than on building the nation, the plight of Muslims cannot, to any significant degree, be alleviated.

All Virtue Comes from controlling one's Tongue

Mu'az ibn Jabal was with the Prophet on one of his journeys. He asked the Prophet to tell him of an action which would take him to heaven, and keep him out of hell. "That is a tremendous question," the Prophet said, "and it is easy for those for whom God makes it easy. Worship God, and do not set up partners alongside Him. Offer prayer, and pay the poor-due; fast during the month of Ramadhan and go on a pilgrimage to, the House of God."

"Shall I tell you the source of all virtue?" the Prophet went on to ask Mu'az, and without waiting for an answer he said: "Fasting is a shield, and charity extinguishes sins as water extinguishes fire. And be sure to pray in the stillness of the night."

"And shall I tell you what the base of religion is, what its pillar is and what its pinnacle is?" the Prophet asked.

"Please do," Mu'az replied.

"Its base is Islam; its pillar is prayer; and its pinnacle is jihad. And shall I tell you what the root of all these things is?"

"Of course," Mu'az said eagerly.

Then the Prophet caught hold of his tongue and said: "Control this."

"What," Mu'az said, "shall we be taken to task for what we say?"

"Of course you will," the Prophet replied. "It is because of people's tongues that they will be thrown head first into the fire of hell."

God's Succour

In the sixteenth century the Portuguese gained control of the Indian Ocean, thus excluding Arabs from eastern commercial routes. So began the European colonial initiative against Muslim lands. With the invention of the steam engine in the seventeenth century, and the Industrial Revolution of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Europeans strengthened their position, which was fully consolidated with the completion, in 1869, of the Suez Canal. Now, with a line of direct passage from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, not a single Muslim country of Africa and central Asia remained free of direct or indirect control from Europe.

As far as material strength was concerned, European nations were not only superior to the Muslims in numbers; they were also far advanced in the quality of resources at their disposal. Muslims had only hand weapons to fall back on, while Europeans had access to long range weapons. No wonder that it seemed to a lot of people that European supremacy would never end. Then God made known His will. The powers of Europe fought among themselves in World War II, inflicting untold damage on one another. Their internal position became so precarious that there was no way they could hold on to their external dominions. European imperial powers were forced to retreat from the African and Asian lands they once bestrode in might and glory.

For the Muslims, however, the difficult part was still to come. Europe had lost its political empire but still, through industrial and technological superiority, it controlled the markets of the world. Muslim countries, with the limited resources at their disposal, sought to catch up. But just as they were beginning to move into the industrial age, the West, to borrow Alvin Toffler's phrase, moved into the super-industrial age. It was then that springs of divine munificence burst out of Arab soil: oil, which converted into petro-wealth made up for the Muslims' backwardness in technological know-how, and gave them an influential position in the modern world economic order.

The fact of the matter is that Muslims are bearers of a divine scripture, unique in that it is preserved in its original state. For this reason, Almighty God has taken upon Himself to protect the Muslims in the world. In this way He protects His Book – the Quran. It was this divine succour that protected the Muslims during Sassanian and Mongol invasions, through the Crusades, the colonial age, and on up to the present day.

But it should be noted that this protection is solely a worldly affair. As far as salvation in the next world is concerned, no assurance of safe conduct has been issued to any race or nation. Muslims have to earn salvation in the next world by first bringing themselves in line with Islam, and then passing on the Word they have been entrusted with to other nations of the world. The Prophet Mohammad spent his life bearing testimony to the Truth before the people of his age, leaving a shining example to those who came

afterwards. Muslims of every age should follow that example, and pass on the Word which they have received, through the Prophet, from God, to the rest of mankind.

With Mohammad, prophethood has come to an end. Now Muslims, as bearers of the prophetic legacy, have to perform the role of Prophets: it is they who have to communicate the message of Islam to other nations of the world. Even Prophets had to fulfill their prophetic obligations in order to deserve the status of prophethood (Quran, 5:67), so how can ordinary Muslims be considered true to their faith if they do not fulfill their Islamic obligations? Fundamental among these obligations is bearing witness to the truth on earth. What claim do we have to be considered followers of Mohammad, if we do not act on his example? If not all, at least a substantial body, of the Muslims, must indeed rise to this task (Quran 3:104).

In ancient times, when Church was not separate from State, the basis of politics was religion. Even a harmless movement, aimed solely at spreading the Word of God, used to be considered a threat by the government of the day. Drastic and violent measures would be taken to stamp out a movement which struck at the very basis of political power. Those who spread the Word of God were subjected to dire punishments – stoning, crucifixion, death at the stake – by the powers of the day. Now, with Church separate from State, political powers no longer consider a religious message as a threat to their authority. There are far greater facilities and freedom today for communicating the message of Islam than there were in ancient times. It is imperative, however, that those who perform this task steer clear of polemics and politics, for to become involved here would be to compromise their religious message; it would be to create problems where there are none, to alienate people before efforts have been made to win them over. Freedom of thought and the scientific method of study are dominant forces in the world today, ensuring that those who project and promote true religion are able to continue their work freely in every corner of the globe.

Modern thought, it should be noted, has also made Islamic teachings easier to understand. This is just another way in which God has helped Muslims to convey His message to mankind. If Muslims still do not prove equal to the task, what excuse will they have when they come before God, who did everything to make conditions on earth conducive to the spreading of His word?

The Unmasking

There are some people in the world who have not bowed to God in their hearts, and their physical prostration is devoid of spirit. When such people are asked on the day of judgement to prostrate themselves before God, they will not be able to (68:42).

This shows that prostration is by no means a temporary, ritualistic, physical act. It is submission before the Supreme Reality, the subordination of one's whole life to truth. Looked at in this way, this verse does not refer to prostration in the limited sense of the word, but describes an important truth involving the whole life.

In this present world, neither individuals nor nations have submitted to the truth. They have not subordinated themselves to it. By outwardly observing a set of hollow rituals, they pretend to be in the right; they pretend to uphold justice, and to stay far from injustice and exploitation.

But such deceit is possible only in the present world of trial. With the coming of the next life, the situation will suddenly change. Forged coins can be exchanged in the market, but it is not possible to do so in a bank. So it is with the life hereafter. The possibility of presenting falsehood as truth, and unjust actions as just ones, will come to an end.

In the next life, words will reject the false meanings given to them. It will not be possible for anyone to speak of injustice as justice and of falsehood as truth. Then the difference between appearance and reality will disappear. The tongue will utter only words which conform to the truth. Then everyone shall appear in his true colours and the false masks of the world he left behind will be torn away.

Having been able to justify their actions before human beings, people suppose that they have really justified themselves. But only those will be credited as good and truthful who can, on the day of reckoning, prove so before God. In the court of God, truth and falsehood will at last appear in their true light.

An Economic Pearl Harbour

In December 1941, during the second world war, the U.S.A.'s top naval base, Pearl Harbour, on the Pacific island of Hawaii, was attacked without prior warning by the Japanese. So severe was the bombardment that, of the hundred odd naval vessels anchored there, only a handful survived. This had the immediate effect of bringing America into the war as one of the Allied Powers. Up till that point, the U.S.A. had no direct involvement in hostilities save as a supplier of armaments to the enemies of Japan. The Japanese attack had been uncalled-for and ill-considered, but they did not realize the magnitude of their error until 1945, when America finally took its revenge by dropping the first-ever atom bombs on two of Japan's major industrial centres, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thus annihilating Japan as a military power. The Americans then kept a tight military and political hold over Japan. But the latter country, astonishingly, recuperated from the horror of large-scale atomic devastation, and proceeded to adapt itself to an entirely new set of circumstances. Before the second world war, it had relied on the 'power of weapons. But after witnessing the destruction they caused, it relinquished their use and set about reconstructing the country along entirely peaceful lines. Having once adopted this course, the Japanese showed great versatility, resilience and assiduity, and their success has been such that Japan is now considered the second greatest industrial power in the entire world today. Its trade surplus is 37 billion dollars, more even than that of the U.S.A. In the field of industry, the victors have been defeated by the vanquished. Simply by accepting the fact that aggression could not pay dividends and then channelizing its potential with the field of industry, Japan has managed quite miraculously to supersede all the other nations of the world.

The Americans are greatly upset at this state of affairs and refer to the present 'invasion' of Japanese goods as an Economic Pearl Harbour. A book recently published in America, under the title of "Japan-Number One", has become a best-seller. It clearly shows that Japan has far outrun the U.S.A. in business and will soon supersede Britain. So far as foreign exchange is concerned, Japan is the wealthiest country in the world, its foreign exchange reserves totalling 74 billion dollars in 1984 (*The Times of India*, 13-14 June, 1985).

How did Japan turn its military defeat into an economic victory? By encouraging patience and perseverance and avoiding provocation, it concentrated its energies on peaceful (and, of course. remunerative) fields, rather than indulge in retaliatory violence. It initially accepted the military and political supremacy of other nations, quickly adapting itself to new scales of values, then set about the economic rehabilitation of the country without wasting a single moment on bewailing lost opportunities, blaming others for its misfortunes or on pointless nostalgia. Rather than make further mistakes, Pearl Harbour having been the worst, it concentrated all of its attention on seizing existing opportunities. In

short, Japan accepted the blame for its own destruction, and, once having done so, was able seriously to launch itself on its own economic uplift.

We must never lose sight of the fact that we are not lone travellers on this earth. There are always others who are trying to race ahead of us in this world of competition. The resulting situation can be approached in two entirely different ways. One is to collide with anything which obstructs our path. The other is to circumvent obstacles' and then to go on our way. Clearly, the first is self-destructive, while the second, in avoiding confrontations, is much more likely to prove advantageous. A ship which sails straight at a rock or an iceberg is doomed to disaster. It is the ship which veers temporarily off its course to avoid the reefs which will eventually sail safely into harbour. Similarly, Japan, by giving up ideas of military supremacy, has reached a much more worthwhile objective – economic supremacy.

It is worth remembering that Hiroshima and Nagasaki, once symbols of Japan's total annihilation as a military power, are now symbols, forty years later, of Japan's stunning economic success.

Putting Oneself in Others' Shoes and Not Entertaining Suspicions

The Prophet's wife, Aishah was once slanderously accused of misconduct. While the rumours were at their height, Abu Ayub Ansari's wife mentioned to her husband what people were saying about Aishah. Abu Ayub refused on principle to believe it and replied that those who said such things were liars. "Can you imagine yourself doing such a thing?" he asked his wife. "Certainly not," she replied. "Well, how much more chaste and pure Aishah is than you. Why should such actions be attributed unto her?" said Abu Ayub to his wife.

Imparting Islamic Training to Young People

By: Dr. Abdul Haleem Owais

The youth of a nation constitute an integral part of it, because 'youth' is a stage through which every community passes. Problems connected with the training of young people cannot, therefore, be discussed, in isolation from the other factors affecting humanity as a whole.

The correct approach towards the solution of any problem requires that it should be seen in a broader perspective, and that all relevant factors should be given due consideration. If most of our attempts to solve problems fail, it is because one approach has been partial rather than global.

During the last two centuries the Islamic World has witnessed a steady decline, and now needs to experience a reawakening. At a time, when western imperialism was invading the Islamic World, and confronting it with secularism and materialism, ideas for the realization of the Islamic identity were indeed, burgeoning in the minds of so many Muslim leaders. The Algerian revolution was a case in point where this Islamic identity was clearly manifested.

The Sunnah and the Model

History tells us that the companions of the Prophet understood the Quran and Sunnah not through the traditional science of logic, or kalam, but by faith and belief built up on the simplicity of an ideal which emanated from the personality of the Prophet.

We are living in an age of contradiction, be it a contradiction between our writings and behaviour, or between our speeches and conduct. Our politicians, thinkers and leaders are all suffering from the same disease. We do not have anyone who could serve as a Model or Ideal to inspire the youth of our country thus changing the course of history and bringing success in the battle field as well as in the field of science and technology. We must turn, therefore, for guidance and inspiration to the Sunnah, not only as a source of knowledge, but as an ideal, which leads a human-being to be completely in consonance with the Prophet (may peace be upon him) in all of his thoughts and behaviour. The Sunnah here is referred to in its broad sense as a clear plan for human life as required by Islam, and not as a School of Fiqh or Sufism.

Differences in the Education of the Mosques and the Universities

The task of the mosque in the early ages was to produce a generation of committed Muslim scholars while, our Universities of today produce only graduates, and not committed Muslims in the real sense of the word, the reason being that our Universities are deeply influenced by the society and the

surroundings in which they are situated. Their graduates, therefore, see life as a purely materialistic affair. On the other hand, the mosques have always produced people who realized their responsibilities to Allah and society, and who therefore carried out all the responsibilities imposed on them by society.

If the Universities wish to regain their true status, they shall have to benefit from the experience of the mosques.

The Technology of Today's Human Being

Our Universities constantly vie with European and American Universities in the field of technology but the former can surpass the latter only if the technology aimed at by the Universities of the Islamic World is directed towards the service of humanity. If this philosophy governs the processes of technology adopted by the Islamic World, Western Civilization will never be able to compete with it. It goes without saying that the growth of technology without moral supervision inevitably produces destructive forces. This has already had an adverse effect on early civilizations. Therefore, our Universities should direct their technology towards the service of humanity. A good example of this would be the acquisition of such technology as would provide the people with grain so that they could free themselves from the American hegemony in this field. The same purpose would be served by the acquisition of technology for digging deep wells, and fighting diseases.

Training – The Essence of Civilization

It is wrong to conclude that training means only to add one's knowledge; the real meaning and purpose of training is to foster the correct mode of thinking. It is because of the realization of the importance of training in human life, that western nations pay so much attention to the method used. Many of the Muslims even prefer to send their children to Christian Schools instead of Arab Schools because the former have proper training facilities.

In addition to the non-availability of training facilities in the Islamic World, there are some other problems, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The efforts to distort social and Islamic Studies in order to give them a secular character.
2. The active role played by Christian missionaries in the Islamic World.
3. The lack of proper objectives in education.

University education has two aspects: its cultural message, and its preparation of students for different specializations. It is necessary that both of these aspects should be given a thorough reappraisal and restructuring so that the Universities may be able once again to match their glorious past.

Avoiding Retaliation for the Sake of God

While the Muslims were returning from the Bani Mustalaq campaign, A'ishah was detained by the loss of a necklace. She found the necklace and, losing trace of the Muslim party, went to sleep at the place where they had put up camp the night before. There she was spotted by a Companion. He sat her on his camel and, himself holding the reins, set off for Medina. When they reached home, the hypocrites used this episode as an opportunity to spread false scandals about A'ishah. One of those engaged in this scandal-mongering was Mistah, a relative of Abu Bakr, who received a monthly stipend from his comparatively wealthy kinsman. When Abu Bakr discovered Mistah's role in the slander against his daughter A'ishah, he swore an oath that he would not give Mistah any money in future. Then this verse of the Quran was revealed: "Let not the honourable and rich among you swear not to give to their kindred, the poor, and those who have emigrated for the cause of God. Rather, let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish God to forgive you? He is Forgiving, Merciful." (24:22) "Surely, I would like God to forgive me," said Abu Bakr, on hearing of the revelation of this verse.

(Seerat ibn Hisham)

Worshipping Forms

The Quran defines one quality of those true servants of God whom He will be pleased with as their “faith in the unseen” (2:3). As for those who “know only the outward show of the life of this world”. (30:7), they can never come close to God.

From these definitions one can gauge the difference between polytheism and monotheism. Polytheism, one might say, is to see reality on a superficial level, while monotheism is to see reality on a level of inner meanings. A polytheist, in other words, comes to know only those gods that he can see with the eyes of his body. A monotheist, on the other hand, comes to know the God that he can see with the inner eye of his soul. He believes in the unseen, while a polytheist believes only in outward forms.

It is here that the true difference between belief and disbelief lies. A disbeliever is one who lives for that which he can see, while a true believer is one who lives for what he has not seen. The former discovers physical things, while the latter makes discoveries of an intellectual nature. Disbelief is to grasp only that which can be seen; belief, on the other hand, is to be able to grasp those concepts which can only be understood by profound thought.

In every day and age people have gone astray through worshipping superficial forms. The Prophets call on people to believe in God, but since God cannot be seen, few are able to fix their minds on Him. Instead, most people have recourse to those objects which they can actually see. Throughout the ages, people have worshipped objects, from the stars in the sky to the mountains and rivers. Invariably, they have been led to do this by a desire to see something before they will believe it. People were familiar with visual, tangible gods. That was why the call of the Prophets to believe in an invisible God fell for most part on deaf ears.

People take to saint and hero-worship for the same reason. God cannot be seen, so they cannot grasp His greatness. Saints and popular heroes, on the other hand, can be seen by men, so people are quick to acknowledge their greatness, and take to worshipping them. Saint and hero-worship are just other forms of idol worship, even though their adherents call them piety, religion, and even monotheism.

A Saying of the Prophet Mohammad

Abu Huraira * reported the Prophet as saying:

“There are three things that are especially pleasing to God: that you should worship Him, ascribing no partners unto Him; that you should all cling to the rope of God and not be divided among yourselves; and that you should have a benevolent attitude towards those whom God has put in charge of your affairs. And three things cause Him immense displeasure: idle talk, asking too many questions and wasting money.”

(Sahih Muslim)

Worshipping God means concentrating one's entire attention on Him. One who truly worships God feels empty if there is no place in his life for God. To ascribe partners to God, on the other hand, is to make something besides God the focus of one's attention. To forsake all forms of false worship, and to serve one God alone, is the essence of Islam. When one does this, one becomes a selfless soul; one thinks of others before oneself. Those who have developed such qualities will remain united among themselves; they will not split up, into sects. In the same way, Muslims should have a benevolent, co-operative attitude towards those who are in positions of responsibility; they should not set themselves up as rivals to their leaders. There is another saying of the Prophet, contained in the same Sahih Muslim's collection, which tells us that religion is to wish everyone well, including one's leaders. People usually try to unseat, by protest and rioting, leaders in whom they have found some fault. They even attach the label of Islam to their campaigns. But this is not the Islamic way. What one should do, as a good Muslim, when one sees some fault in a leader, is seek to persuade him, in an affectionate and benevolent manner, to change his ways.

God prefers his servants to be more concerned with actions than with words. That is why idle talk and prattle causes Him great displeasure. It is usually people of a neglectful nature who ask unnecessary questions. There are some questions that have to be asked, but there are many on the contrary that people could answer themselves were only they to make the effort and be mentally alert. Likewise there are ways of spending money which are extravagant and ways which are constructive. Those who are careless and selfish in their expenditure are worse than animals in God's sight. They certainly cannot expect Him to shower them with His mercy.

The words of the Prophet are as applicable today as they were when he spoke them. But is there anyone who will listen?

* One of the most constant attendants of the Prophet, and has related more traditions of the sayings and doings of the Prophet than any other individual.

The Kernel of Truth

Garry Miller, an American Christian, was a College Bible teacher. It occurred to him in 1978 to read the Quran in order to learn what its contents were. After a comparative study of the Bible and the Quran, the truth dawned upon him and he accepted Islam, and changed his name to Abdul Ahad Umer. At present he lives in Canada with his wife who is also newly converted. But he does not like to be called a convert. "I haven't converted to Islam," he says, "but merely reverted to the religion of my birthright (*Muslim Journal*, Chicago, June 21, 1985).

Garry Miller has, in fact pointed out a truth which is expressed in these words in the Quran:

"Therefore set your face in devotion to the true faith, the upright nature with which God has endowed man (30:30).

The Prophet expressed the same truth in these words:

"Every new born is of the divine nature, that is, everyone is a born Muslim (Muslim literally means one who has submitted to his Lord).

God has created him a believer."

It is his national traditions and the society around him that lead him later to accept different creeds or ideologies. The object, therefore, of Islamic missionary work is not really to change people's religion, but only to remove the artificial overlay of irrelevant beliefs. Wherever, it is possible to do this, what remains is a solid core of true belief.

Everyone, in essence, is a believer, even though he may appear to be something else from the outside.